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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ERNEST CANEVA

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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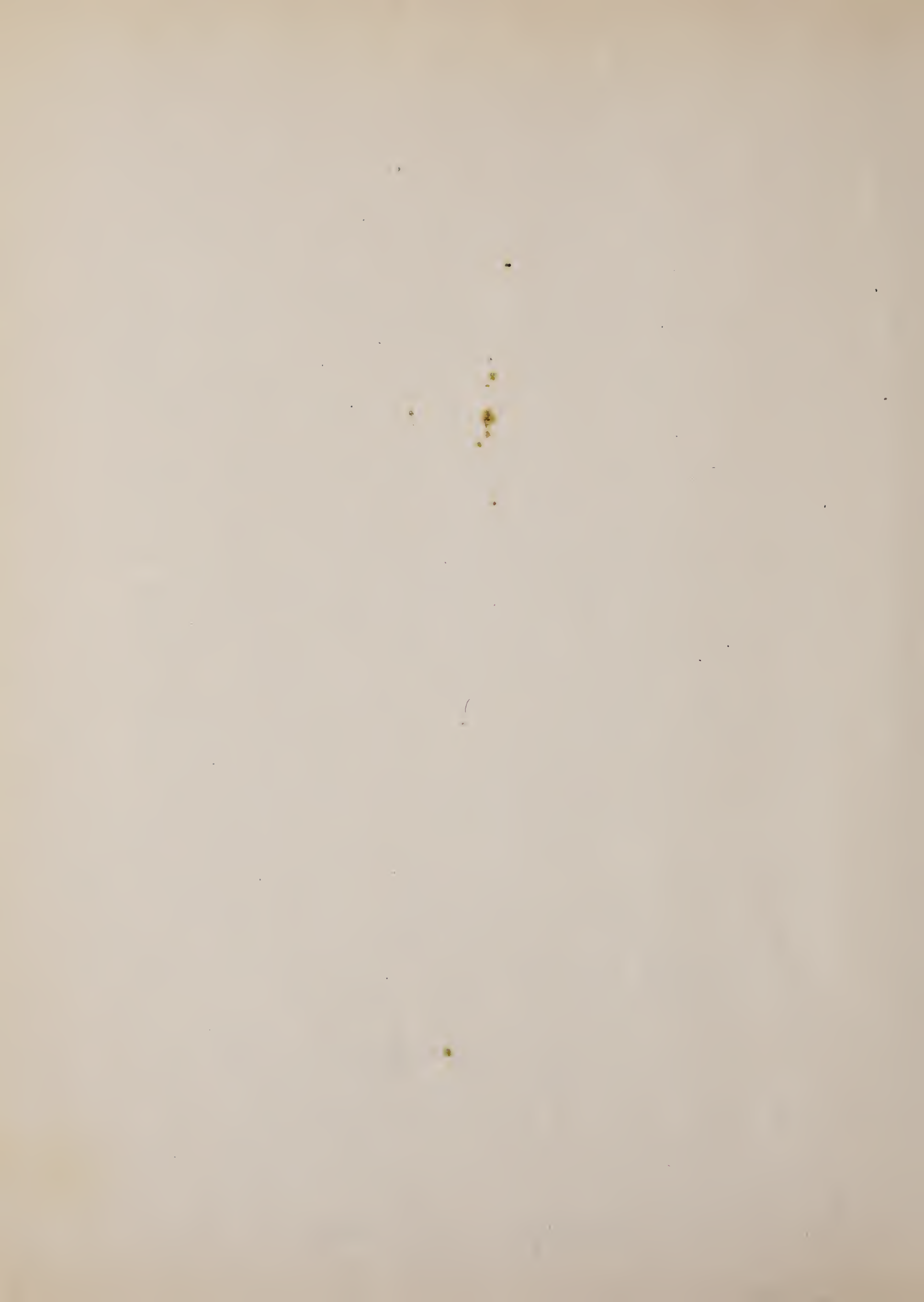
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INTERVIEWEE: Ernest Caneva

INTERVIEWERS: Bob Anderson and Dan Conner

ANDERSON: This is an interview with Mr. Ernest Caneva for the Oral History Program at Joliet Junior College by Dan Conner and Bob Anderson on May 30, 1973.

ANDERSON: First we'd like to ask you, Mr. Caneva, when you were born--when and where?

CANEVA: I was born in Italy, in the northern part of Italy December 8, 1907. We came to the United States about a year after. I was just a young child when we got here. We moved to Michigan--went to Michigan for about one year in the northern part of the peninsula and from there we went to Clinton, Indiana, and we lived in Clinton, Indiana until 1919. At that time my mother died and Dad decided to take us all back to Europe again or back to see the family and so on. Now Dad was a band director all his life and also a businessman. He always felt that business was first and music second, and he enjoyed it that way. In Clinton, Indiana he had what was called at that time one of the finest Italian bands in that particular part of Indiana. And of course, Mother was a fine musician, too. She was a violinist and a mandolin player, so music was part of the family. Rehearsals in our home happened every night. People came in, and in those days we didn't have radio, TV, and so on. So consequently they made their own music and drank their own wine and really had a good time. It was just one of those things. It was just



one of those things. It was just a family affair with businessmen around and so on. I started when I was about eight years old playing drums and the next thing you know I was playing with the adult band. In those days they played for funerals. They played for weddings and you name it. So besides being busy with the business he was in, why he was very, very active in music. It was just one of those things where I was born and raised right with it. When we went back to Europe we intended to go for a visit for three months and it ended up that we stayed for five years. So I had five years of music education in Europe studying with some fine teachers there and also in some of the schools.

CONNER: This is in Italy?

CANEVA: In Italy, yes.

ANDERSON: How old were you?

CANEVA: We left Clinton when I was twelve and I came back when I was seventeen, almost eighteen years old. At that time right after World War I, well it was around 1924-25, I don't recall exactly, my brother had already started in music. We moved to Chicago and stayed for about six months. I didn't care for the city too much then and eventually came to Lockport in 1925. Dad opened a business there and immediately we got involved in music again. We opened a studio in Joliet. My brother and I had a studio at the Pratt Building right across from the Boston Store for a good many





years. In 1932 the superintendent of the Lockport High got a hold of me and asked me if I would consider taking over the band. He said at the time, "Well, you only have to work an hour a day during the band rehearsals and that'll be about it--part-time work." Well, it turned out that after two months I was in there eight hours a day. The Feeder System was very, very small. There were about twenty-two pieces all totaled. By the end of the year I had gotten rid of about eleven of the students.

ANDERSON: When was this now?

CANEVA: 1932. . . students that didn't have the pride, didn't have that wanting to play. But it was nice because we had an eight-period schedule with three study halls, and I was able to take every student every day and give him a private lesson right in school. I didn't get paid for it. As a matter of fact, my salary at the time was \$45 a month.

ANDERSON: Did you spend that all in one place? [laughter]

CANEVA: I was married and had a little girl at the time, too, so you know we kind of struggled a little bit. But we didn't mind it because it was during the Depression years and nobody else had anything, so with a little private lesson here and there we got by pretty well. Things began to start. We grew from twenty-two to about thirty-seven the second year. In 1934 Mr. McAllister called me. They had a district contest in Joliet. He asked me if I would enter the contest.



Well, knowing very little about contests and having the instrumentation that I had, I was a little bit leary, but this man was gracious. He called me and had asked me to come down and see him. And this is what he said, "If you don't go into it this year, next year you'll come up with the same thing. Get your feet wet now and get started." And it was the best thing that ever happened because the band continued to grow and we came through with a second division which was good. It was kind of funny, though. The band that played before us had ninety-five pieces so the chairs had to be taken off the stage and the one that followed us had ninety-five and I think the Joliet boys at that time really enjoyed themselves and learned something about moving chairs back and forth on the stage. [laughter] So that's the way we started. In 1938 we entered our first contest in Springfield, Illinois. That's the first time we got first. We won the governor's trophy in Class B. At that time Class B was up to 750 students, so over 750 was Class A. That went along until 1940 when we got an invitation to go up to the World's Fair in New York. When I received the invitation I thought, "Well, this is just one of those things; we'll never make it." But I did show it to my superintendent and he said, "Why don't you go?" Immediately parents got together and we went to the World's Fair in New York. We were gone for about seven or eight days. And I think that motivated the community and also motivated the students, you know what I mean. Of course, World War II started. Then we had a





problem there because boys were being inducted. We were losing our senior boys and I decided then to use girls in the band. That was the coming thing anyhow. We went from sixty-five to ninety overnight almost. A little weak from the standpoint of background and so on, but the girls, of course, at times showed an activity the boys didn't show and they showed a pride that the boys didn't show. As far as a girl marching, I think she does a beautiful job right from her freshman year. And they have a poise that boys don't acquire until they're about sixteen or seventeen. And we kept going that way. I mean, World War II was one of those things where you'd just struggle along. You couldn't get gasoline to go anyplace; you couldn't get tires to go anyplace. So we concentrated on the work in the community, war bonds, parades, and things of that sort. At that time, too, they asked me if I'd take over the chorus. So I had the whole instrumental, rather, the whole musical department in my hands for almost fifteen years. We had quite a bit of success, I mean, combining the chorus with the band. Also one nice thing about it--both boys and girls could take active parts in both chorus and band and I feel that's a great thing for anybody that's going into the music field. The singing, of course, goes along with the playing an instrument and reading helps. Many a time I jokingly say to a student, "Would you sing it that way? Then why are you playing it that way?" The strange thing was there was no Feeder System at the time and this is one of the things that I concentrated on. I organized the St. Dennis Band, the Chaney Band. I had Otto Mattei take over the band. Fairmont had a nice grade school band and we went over to Ludwig and organized a band, the Calvin Grove band, and I think the last band was the Homer Band. We'd thought we'd have it before I finished my career,



and probably some day they will have it. But at one time we had six bands marching in our Memorial Day and Labor Day parades in Lockport, and they were fine bands. I mean by that that it created a little competition among the bands. It developed something that still exists today and we hope will continue, I mean from the standpoint of feeding the high school band. We've had a great number of students who have gone out into the world and become band directors and are involved in music or involved, for example, in other fields of activities that with a little background in music that really helps make fine men and women out of them, you see. I'd like to talk a little bit about the man that I think was instrumental in the development of the instrumental program in the state of Illinois, the man I feel we owe everything we have, too, and that's Mr. McAllister. To me he was just like a father. There wasn't a time that I couldn't call him and say, "Mr. McAllister, I have a problem here. How do I go about solving it?" something of that sort. He was always gracious enough to come down and sit down and talk things over, you see what I mean. Many a time, for example, before contest he'd call me up and ask me, "Are you prepared? Do you think that you have everything the way you'd like to have it? You ought to bring your band down. We'll play the numbers for you." You follow me? We'd do that. He'd take time, for example, during his regular rehearsal and we'd get permission from our school authorities to take the whole band down. We'd sit there and he'd turn around, for example, "Now are you satisfied with this? Do you like the way this was played? Do you understand it? Would any of your youngsters like to hear your part over again?" I mean it was a clinic that was almost unbelievable. The repore between the two of us was just fantastic. Not only from the standpoint of the





friendship that we developed in music but also the friendship we developed between ourselves. I had a lot of respect for him. I have the same respect for him that I had when I first met the man. He was a little dictator from the standpoint of discipline and everything else, not only with his students but also with his family and also with the people that surrounded him. He was a great man.

ANDERSON: That's what you hear about him, you know, that he ran everything with an iron fist, but you never hear this side of the story.

CANEVA: He was a human being. Whether he was an individual of that type. . . he reminds me so much of General Eisenhower in his carriage and everything else. And he ran a program that was a discipline program even with his students. I think if I were a student at the time in Joliet and I was one of the minor students in that group I would feel, "Aw, shucks. Who does he think he is?" You know what I mean. Kids are kids; they think that way. But after you get out you start thinking, "Look what this man has done for me." I feel myself that I got so much from this man from the standpoint of the development of the program, from the standpoint of seeing things. For example, in the perspective that you wouldn't see them unless you actually have years of experience. I got all of this from that man because I had the facility of being close to him and at the same time being able to call him and contact him and talk things over and so on. We've many a time gone out judging together, and I suppose I was a privileged character because he'd call me and ask me to go along with him. As a matter of fact, I was so. . . I felt so much toward the man that when I started to write and had some numbers published I told him that I wanted to do something. I wanted to do





something for him, and I asked Forest McAllister if he would collaborate with me. We did write four or five numbers that are published by Boozi and Hawcks. I did it because I felt that I owed that man something and I didn't know how to repay him for what he had done for me, you see. But Mac to me was a human being. He was a man that was dedicated to his work. It's very, very seldom that you have over a period of years a man that comes along that will do so much for a community like he did. His concerts, for example. He'd run as many as three in one set. The auditorium was filled. You couldn't get a seat. I always had the privilege of coming down, for example, and sitting down with him before a concert talking things over. He'd call me down and he'd have me sit during the rehearsal. "Let me know if there's anything." He was never humble to ask anybody if there was any help possible that we could give him to make his group a better group, a better-playing group, a better-disciplined group. He was the kind of individual, for example, that took light from anybody no matter how small the man was and that's why I say I don't know why he likes me as much as he did and showed respect for me. Even up to the point, for example, when he got sick and his wife, Clara, asked me to go down to the house. I went down to the house and spent a little time with him, you know what I mean. Through this particular period we felt a sense of elation in the fact it was just like saying my wife here about two months ago had the opportunity to have tea with Mrs. Nixon. I know how she felt. I know how my daughter felt when Pat Nixon shook hands with her right at the White House. In fact, she made a remark, "I'm sitting on my own chairs; we paid for these chairs." You know, you just don't get to say things like that. That's the way I felt towards Mac, I mean, the respect was there. I'll never have enough to say about this man because I think he was the father of



the, let's not say college bands or anything of that sort, but of high school bands, not only in the state of Illinois but also in the United States.

ANDERSON: How do you account for the quality of musicianship being so high in his band? Like today, for instance, the quality of musicianship in a high school. . .It doesn't sound like it is as good today as it was back then.

CANEVA: First you're talking about Joliet and these things will happen. You'll have your ups and downs. Mac started in 1912 I understand. His first little band was in 1912. They always talk about the little beer kegs that they were sitting on that would be their chairs. They had made shift stands and I don't recall how many members they had at that particular time, but you see he was smart in this way that he started a feeder system like I did in Lockport and this is one of the things that I learned from him. He went after his grade school bands. He talked with Professor Thompson who was a supervisor of music in the Joliet grade schools at that time. I recall that in 1921, I wasn't here but I talked to Mr. Thompson, and I had a paper like this that I had to get out for Northwestern. I went down to Joliet and sat down with Mr. Thompson and got a little bit of the background of the Joliet system. It was a system that was about the same as Mason City has today. I'm talking about the Mason City, Iowa Band now also one of the finest in the United States at that particular time. They had this program, for example, where they started these youngsters in fourth grade and carried them through with private lessons and everything else and the surprising thing is this: it's unbelievable people who today are involved in music that







have graduated from that particular system, I mean graduated from Joliet Township High School at that particular time in the McAllister era. Now this same particular program continued with Bruce. Today you're talking about a drop in caliber of musicianship and so on. We find that division in the three schools. In those days let's say if possible they'd start about a hundred youngsters in fourth or fifth grade--thirty of them would survive and those thirty would go on to the high school band, but they were the cream of the crop. Then they got to the point where, for example, there was an overload where they went beyond the one hundred and went into one hundred and fifty. So then they organized what was then know as the ROTC Band to be the second band, but you still have a fantastic quality of students that remained in that high school band. I would say right now that, this was my say all the time, I'm talking about my band now, "you people play well. We have to work with you, but, man to man, don't try to go against any Joliet student." They have training that was unbelievable, and they were dedicated. That was the thing that was important. They were dedicated! That Joliet Township High School Band was known all over the United States and possibly know all over the world. I mean, that's one of the finest outstanding organizations in the world made up of people of that particular age, you see. And most of them, I would say 25%, are music majors in some way or the other. I'm not trying to say that every one of them became band directors, but they played night clubs or they got mixed up with other organizations and so on so that they carried music with them throughout their lifetime, you see. And it was all due to this man, I mean the situation, the system that he had developed and the pride that he had developed in the students in spite of the fact that he was a disciplinarian that it was almost unbe-



lievable. Many a time I used to hear his peers, for example. They would say, "I can't do it, Mac. I can't control the youngster or make a soldier out of him." Well, we're all human. We have our own ways of approaching youngsters. This is the way he did it and this is the way he got his results, and that was the way he was going to do it. I remember this was before there were a lot of students, for example, not too many that complained about everything. I mean, kids will do that, but after they were out of school I played with the Joliet High School Band; that was a big thing, and they were proud of it. And you had men like Clifford Zillia, for example, or we could go back and name a number of men who were great men today that were proud of the fact that they were a member of that particular group. There were so many of them over a period of years that today are college people. I mean people that are working to continue in the same field, and they're doing well, you see. In the meantime, we were going along and I suppose getting a little bit bigger. The enthusiasm was there. And the nice thing about it was this; they were in Class A. We were in Class B. There was no competition between the two of us. Mac, I remember one year, went west with his band; we went East. We went to the World's Fair in New York and he went to California to a tour of the western states. We went down to the railroad station and saw him off and waited until he came back and kept a repore there that was always. . . The Joliet boys would come up there. Of course, I knew why they were coming. They were interested in some my girls. They didn't have any, so they'd come up there. Many, many a time I'd have something I wanted them to do and I'd ask some of the Joliet boys. Like I said, it was one of those things that here are two schools and two people that are not fighting each other. Oh, we might





have some battles on the athletic field. I mean by that that maybe the athletic people felt that competition or some of the top people felt it but never in music. We had a repore there. Music would come in. For example, Mac would call me up and he'd say, "I got some new pieces here that I think you'd be interested in. If you can't use them for anything else, use them for sight reading." And when I left Lockport I left quite a bit of Joliet music that was given to me by A. R. They were complimentary copies that he wouldn't use. Then once in a while he would call up and he'd say, "By the way, I'm missing a number in a set of books. Do you know where they're at?" He had forgotten he had given them to me a couple years before. "I need that. We've got a little program on and I need that particular number." In Lockport we had some fine, fine years. I mean the program kept going all the time. The enthusiasm was there. As I said, we went to the World's Fair in New York in 1940 and before that we started with the Springfield Fair. We won five governor's trophies during that particular time. We were competing in our district and state contest and never got a second except that one we started out with the first time. Then, of course, we took part in Lions Club parades and so on. Now when I say we never got a second, we did get a second in Atlantic City in this Lions International Parade. An all-state band from Mississippi beat us out by a point or two. I didn't think it was fair that a high school band, any high school band, had to compete against an all-state band. It didn't sound right, and I approached the authorities and I asked if they would change that for future dates. As a matter of fact, it was funny. They had an all-state Tennessee, that is, a band from Tennessee and Mississippi had an all-state band well grounded. And they've continued that right straight through. Now that only means that





any high school band that goes into that contest has to compete with these all-state bands. Now Georgia has a fine all-state band that participated in the Lions Club parade. They started in January to prepare for June. They'd take out the youngsters and give them the music and in the meantime even give them some of the routines that they're going to use, you see. But this is the type of thing we had to compete against. The following year it was held in Chicago and that all-state band came in seventh. We beat them out; we had first. The year after that when Bruce Housneck at the time was director, we again took the band to Chicago and the two bands tied. For the first time two bands got the same number of points from six judges right on down the line. Both bands scored 196.4 out of a possible 200. Well, it wasn't the field routine or maybe the playing; maybe he had a point more here and I got one over here to make it up. No, it was exactly the same all the way through.

ANDERSON: I imagine your people were really on top of the world.

CANEVA: Oh, we were thrilled. Of course, by that time the school had gone on to a pretty good sized school around 1500 or 1600. Just one of those things, that's all. But even with Bruce, for example, after Mac died we had a repore that was fine, real good. The friendship that was between the two bands was just unbelievable. Again, I don't know whether music does that or whether the kids who go into organizations of this type are a little bit different. We find that even in our schools, for example, you find the top students are involved in programs of this type, music programs. It seems as though they take an interest not only to the instrument. And I might say this, on this trip that we had we did two



shows for Arthur Godfrey. He said something to these youngsters that I'll never forget. "If you apply the time that you applied to learn those instruments and the dedication that you applied to learn those instruments, you can't help to be a success in whatever you undertake after you get out of school." And if we think back, I don't know how much practice you put in on your instrument, but I know how much I do, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I tackled any problem that I had with technical skill or mental skill with the same enthusiasm that somebody, for example, tackled a hobby of his. I just lived it. I used to get angry at myself for not being able to do it but at the same time you fine out that later one, two, three weeks or four weeks or six months later, "Hey, I can do this. Why was it so hard before?" Most things you grow and you don't notice them. It's just like anything else, you see. I know one thing, youngsters come in. . . Johnny played the horn. Jimmy's going to play the horn because Johnny played the horn. Johnny finds out that three months later, "Hey, this is getting to be a little work here." It's taking a little time. So the next thing you know he levels off. He either stays there or he drops out. Luckily, we don't have too many of these because the organization itself for some reason or another seems to draw the friendship that you make. You talk about what music does. We came back from Europe. By that time I'd forgotten quite a bit of English because remember from the age of twelve through the age of seventeen. . . man, I don't want to say that some things have happened to me because. . . Well, just one case, for example. When I came back and we went to Chicago I ran into a friend of mine that I went to school with in Clinton, Indiana. He was also of Italian extraction and at that time people had a tendency of speaking their own language. In





other words, at home my dad and mother would talk Italian. If you were a Pole, of course, you'd have Polish and so on, But when you went to school with your frinds you spoke English; you tried to anyhow. We were walking down Michigan Avenue and I was trying to say something to him and he said, "Look it, talk Italian to me, would you? I can understand you better." A few years ago I went back to Europe and I met some of my friends that were over there on tour and things of that sort, and I wanted to talk Italian to them. They said, "Talk in English because we understand you better." (laughter) But as far as the background, it was at the time I didn't care for it too much. I'd just assume wear my old straw hat and a pair of overalls and jump in the Wabash River than over there. And for a long time there I was dreaming at night of coming back. Well, five years later we did come back.

ANDERSON: What was your major instrument?

CANEVA: I started with the drums and you'll probably get a good kick out of this. Every night you'd either have a pair of drumsticks and you were beating on the floor or something of that sort or even a guitar underneath the bed and you're strumming away with it, you know. You're about six or seven years old. You were told to go to sleep. Of course, you didn't; you wanted to do something. I happened to point out there that I was getting along with the snare drums pretty well, not the type of drumming we do today but let's say self-taught in some ways. Well, when my dad found out that I was serious about it he got me a drum teacher. It was the snare drummer in this band that gave me a few lessons. Well, the next thing you know he gave me a peck horn. Do you know what a peck horn is--upright alto.



ANDERSON: Oh yes.

CANEVA: Right. All you do in un-ta-un-ta-un-ta-ta and so on. You know I developed a pretty good ear by that time and I never thought of trying to read music or anything like that, but as far as hearing the sound go up and down, it was easy. At least it came easy to me. And the rhythm that I got from the drum really helped playing the peck horn. I remember being at rehearsal one time. Here I was, about I think eight years old, and I was playing this peck horn and he got a little bit teed off at his first horn player. There was a little rhythm in there that the guy probably couldn't get. He turned around and he said, "Look it, I bet you the kid can do it." And he threw the music in front of me. I couldn't read, but I had a good enough ear. As I was playing the key of F, for example, when I was playing the second horn I'd be playing an A. All right, if I changed from the tonic up to the B flat Subdominant or back to the C dominant chord all I had to do was move down one step either one way or the other and my ear would tell me when I wanted to make the change. As far as the rhythm, that was easy. I'll never forget that that time because he threw that at me to show this guy and what happened--they find out that I can't read, so I got out of there in a hurry. Well, what happened after that was my dad would always start a group of beginners. Now you've got to remember this is a coal mining town. Now whether they paid for the lessons, I don't know, but he started a group of beginners and he'd start out with the Solfegio method of reading off of a blackboard, being able to sing notes, learning something about keys before he gave them an instrument. He'd start out with sixteen youngsters, for example, and I'm talking youngsters because in those days they started them out when they were thirteen, fourteen, or





fifteen years old. We didn't have the grade school systems that we have today. He probably dropped about six. I mean by that that maybe ten would make it. Among that group there were some older ones that were, let's say, your age. To me they were men, and in those days they wore their moustache and so on. Consequently, they looked like they were fifty years old to me. We'd start out with, for example, doing four beats, doing two beats and so on. You were learning the rhythm; you were learning to read the notes and so on. Well, I'd see these big flucaks going and I'd start laughing. That happened every time. But in the meantime, it would help because I had a chance to do it two or three times. In other words, I didn't get my first lesson in the series of lessons but I'd go right back from the beginning again, and I learned something. After that even with some of the fine teachers that I had, for example, from Vandercook to some of the teachers I had at DePaul University. They asked me particularly in theory and harmony or anything of that sort of composition, "How much of it have you had?" By the last teacher I had already had about thirty numbers published. I said that I wanted to start from scratch. Always keep this in mind, "Is there something that I missed in there? Something that this man has that he can help me with." And I've seen this happen many a time. "Well, I've had two years of this and three years of that and four years of the other thing," and the poor guy had four years of nothing. You find that, too, in some of the musicians that come up and say, "Well, I play trombone." Then when you try them out you go, "Where did you ever learn to play the trombone?" It was just a matter of trying to get away from going to here and over here and over here and over here in order to get here--a straight line. And then I ran into one of the Dr. . . . I can't remember his name. He was a teacher at DePaul





and I studied composition with him. I had a little problem that I had been working on for two weeks and I couldn't solve it. I threw this little sketch at him and I said, "Doctor, I'm having trouble with this; I just can't seem to resolve it." And he sat down at the piano. That's the first thing that amazed me. This great man, he was eighty years old at the time, sat down with the piano and he played through it and he says, "This is good. Nothing's wrong with this." I said, "I want to know how I got there. I can tell it's not bad, I mean from the standpoint. . . ." In fact, I was so tired because I had rewritten that maybe eighteen or twenty times by that time. But I couldn't understand how, why. "Why does it take me so long? That shouldn't be that big of a problem." Well, he turned around to me and he said, "Young man, you know Beethoven wrote nineteen endings to the Fifth Symphony and you're complaining about this?" (laughter) That, I think, was part of the lesson that I got way back when I was a kid with Dad when he'd make me go over those things. Not once, really three times, sometimes four or five times until he felt, "He's got it now." And the funny thing about it, when we were in Europe first I played with the band there, the band that he had. You see, he started out as a waterboy at first in that band.

ANDERSON: A waterboy?

CANEVA: A waterboy. In other words, whenever they give concerts or something of that sort, well, it could of been a flask of wine, but it was water, too. And then he carried the bass drum. Now when you were marching there you had somebody to carry the bass drum for you, and the bass drum leader didn't have to do what we're doing today, you know. And the next thing you know he developed to solo cornet player in that



band and eventually became the conductor of that band. And for the last thirty years of his life he'd go back every summer to give his concerts and then come back here. So all of that was just like getting up and having your breakfast in the morning. I mean, it was going with me and my brother, too. Both of us, or all three of us, were I'd say pretty good musicians. We had a good training because it was consistent talking at home about what would happen here or even watching what was going on if you were learning. As a matter of fact, I was kind of surprised because when I went to Northwestern at how little some of these people knew about how unprepared they were to come into colleges, for example, from their high schools. I didn't realize that some of these youngsters were coming in from homes that didn't even know what a trombone or clarinet was. I mean, these kids were learning it in school. They got all they could in four years. Like Verdi said, "I'm ninety-two years old. Time for me to die and I'm just beginning to live something." Music, when you think you know something, you know nothing. You might as well start from the very beginning because it's a surprise all the time. It's one of those things, for example, at least I feel that way. For a long time I felt that I didn't want to be a high school teacher. To me the surprise was that you never do the same thing the same way year in and year out. It always changes. You know, you have a certain pattern, we'll say. A coach does the same thing. He's got a good backfield this year and his line isn't worth a ----- so he's got to work out plays to utilize the strength that he has on that team. Well, we do the same thing in our organization. The last couple of years my cornet section was very weak--weak when I think back to some of the cornet players I had. Well, I would have been foolish to try to concentrate on some





things where you're showing up your brasses particularly if you're going into contest. So I struck to the force of destiny. In other words, my woodwind section was tremendous. I'd been foolish to turn around and play some of the things, for example, that feature the brasses. I had enough of experience with things of that sort that it's murder waiting for them to hit that high C then never come back wondering if it's going to be there. (laughter)

ANDERSON: What did you finally end up on as a major instrument like in college?

CANEVA: A clarinet. I did have a good background in piano and then I went into the piano accordion. For a long time there we did professional work on the piano accordion. My brother was fine on the accordion, and you'd be surprised. The thing I like the most, for example, if I was playing the accordion I would always analyze the harmonic content of the music that I was playing--all the time. I enjoyed doing that. I'd take, for example, a piece of music and play it and I'd watch the modulations and the changes in harmony and so on and, boy, that helps. It's studying the grammar of music. That means only one thing. That when you're, for example, conducting a group, working with a group you're looking for that all the time. You're looking for the secondary parts. I think Bill brought something out in one of the passages. That one note, for example. I don't recall whether it was on a horn or whether it was in one of the doubles, the saxophone or whatever it happened to be. It's a lead note into the next key and that one note is so important because if it isn't there. . . In fact, on the Battle Hymn of the Republic, if you're familiar with it, there's a break in the harmony there and all we had was one



second to just float into that one note. We told the accompanist, "Now I want that note strong. I want them to hear that note." Actually if you miss that, it's an abrupt change, you see. I always said this, "To me it's just as important, in fact more important sometimes, to have a good third-first clarinet or a good second, a first clarinet in the second chair or a good third horn or a second horn as it is to have a good soloist and sometimes more because they don't realize that when you sit down and you write you don't think in terms of, 'Oh gee, now wait a minute. I got a good first horn and the fourth horn isn't worth a ---- so what am I going to do? I'm going to give him potatoes.'" You can't do that because this is where, for example, in your changes seven goes to three, three goes to seven and you've got to hear that. If you don't hear those movements, for example, tone color movements, let's call it that. This, I think, is a downfall of a lot of organizations, and this is one of the things that I think you people notice, Bill Revelle--there's a violinist. He can tell you more about the clairnet than he can the violin because he made it his business to study it, and you know he didn't sacrifice one instrument. It didn't make any difference whether it was a trombone or whether it was a clairnet or a sax. Whatever it was that he had a touch on and he had the answer for you, you see. And he had some fine bands. Well, in Lockport, as I said, we continued the way the program was started and you just had to go along with it. You could feel the strength of us coming. We came up to the Music Man Contest. At that time they were going to pick one band from each state to represent the state. I think it was supposed to be forty-eight bands. Harold Waleus approached me and asked me if I would consider going. I said, "Harold, I think there are two organizations that you should consider that I feel are a little





stronger than I think the Lockport band would be." And he said, "Name them." I said, "Joliet and Bruce Housenect. He said, "We've already talked to Bruce. He wants to go as a guest band and they won't accept him as a guest band." "Well then," I said, "there's Vern Reimers out in York." Well, he does a lot with his concert band but very little marching. Now he said, "If you feel that you would like to undertake it, I'll approach the other four or five men that are involved in this in the state of Illinois and see what they think." And we were the band that was picked. We worked. We worked with this in mind. Now, for example, we're going to compete against Texas, Louisiana. We're going to compete with states down there that are out in fields already.

ANDERSON: Yes, three hundred pieces.

CANEVA: And here we are with snow this high. You can't get out with your band. So I started about January. I had no idea what we were going to play. And I took the kids in the gym without their instruments. We'd spend maybe two hours, two hours and a half a week just marching. Boy, they hit those black lines one, two, three, four--no problem. I mean by that that I got them down to eighty-five or ninety that were going to march to the point where they were just like little tin soldiers. No ideas as to the type of show that I was going to put on. Well, we got that and then we started working on posture. We worked on all the fundamentals--everything was fundamentals. Marching comes along and I start putting some music together. Now what are we going to do? Are we going to use anything from Music Man? Who are the judges going to be? I had no idea, and I really didn't want to know because when you start thinking of some of the people that you know around the country that are



going to judge you, right away you think, "Well, this man's tendency is over here and the other one's is over here, you see." You're going to get confused. So I took "The World is Waiting for the Sunrise" and I made an arrangement of it for the band, and it worked out fine. Cut out the baritone part, that little solo in there that you couldn't use anyhow. As a matter of fact, I've been asked to make that arrangement for marching bands around the country. We had more letters coming in asking for that arrangement. I thought for a while, "I'm going to keep it and just leave it." Just like the March of the Steelmen of Joliet, the Sunrise is what we consider our march, you see. Then I took some other things. I wanted the variety in there. Again not thinking of anything we were going to do out on the the field because I told the kids, "Look it, we're not going to out march them. We're going to have to out play them. It's the only way we can beat anything. If we got good judges and you people do a decent job on the street and on the field, your playing should be more important than the marching end of it." Then I found an arrangement of Alfred Reed, a new arrangement that came out with Music Man and, of course, it doesn't fit because it's a selection of Music Man. So there again I sit down and work out little things here and there so that we could get something that could be used on the field and still maneuver at. The next thing you know three weeks before we left for Mason City the show was developed, but up until that time I didn't know. The strange thing about it was this: not one of all the bands that were there played anything from Music Man; we were the only ones. That was strange. I bet you that every one of those directors was thinking the same way, "What are we going to do?" Well, they came up with razzle dazzle. One of the bands, for example, took off at six to the five--nice marching tempo. Well, they





got in front of the reviewing stand to change it to eight to the five. You try that sometime. I got to the point. . . In fact, it was Vincent Gannon I was talking to and he said, "The worst thing that I ever did with a group of kids was to try anything like that because they just fell apart." We were fortunate in one way to have Carl King and Frank Simon from Iowa as judges. Well, we started off with "The World Is Waiting." Of course, we didn't know who it was because they were placed on the third story looking down the line of march on both sides. On thing we concentrated on was the symphonic style of playing, the dynamics on the street.

ANDERSON: Even on the march?

CANEVA: On the march, oh yes. The pianos were pianissimo. You could hear us when we went by the reviewing stand, and our marching is "hold still from here on up." I mean by that is do not move your body up here because it's going to affect your playing. I learned that in Europe, you see, marching with the band. Because what we do there, for example, in order to attract the people on a Sunday night when you gave your Sunday concerts you'd leave the band group and it was three blocks away and you'd play walking down the street. You wouldn't march; you'd walk down the street to play the symphonic marches. Of course, not knowing how to march at the time I'd stumble over every stone and you name it that was on the street and they'd laugh at me. So it taught me a lot. Again, it goes right back to the fundamentals that I learned from home and talking part, and living with this, I think, has helped me quite a bit. So the outcome was that we won that contest.

ANDERSON: You were in the movie?



CANEVA: No, we were given a ten-day tour out East. This was funny; we won the contest. We were supposed to leave that night for Chicago and spend the night in one of the hotels, then play in front of the Tribune Tower and the Times Square and so on. We were supposed to be on the Don McNeal show that morning and I said, "We are not going to go to Chicago. We want to go home." Well, you can't do that. You know that if you win you're going to have to take this tour. To them it was advertising Music Man, you see. They were using us for that purpose. They gave us \$10,000 worth of instruments besides that. So I mean it was a tremendous thing to win. Then, of course, all the publicity we got on it was just unbelievable. I mean you had people from all over the United States that were getting the publicity that was sent out by Warner Brothers. I sat until two o'clock in the morning with seven officials of Warner Brothers, representing Warner Brothers' film, arguing with them because I said this band is not going to go to Chicago. It's going to Lockport. They want a change of clothes. If I'd known then who I was talking to at the time I would have said, "Yes, people, yes." (laughter) I was talking to the president and some of the seven representatives of Warner Brothers in the different districts in the United States and finally they came to me. One of them said, "My name is Ernie. The same as yours. Can't we get together?" I said, "Yes, my kids are going to Lockport." He said, "Why?" I said, "These kids aren't ready to go on a ten-day tour. They need a change of clothing." "But you knew that if you were going to . . ." I said, "I had no idea that we were going to get top prize." "In fact," I said, "if we had gotten fourth or fifth or anything like that why we would have been happy." Finally it ended up that I was to go on the Don McNeill show that morning with Bob Preston and I don't recall the name of the girl that





was in the show. Well, the three of us were on that show together for about a half hour. The band came in about ten o'clock in the morning and from there we took off and went to. . . After we gave our concerts in Chicago, we took off for New York at the New Yorker. They had the World's Fair of Music at that time going on. We were invited to the city hall and given the keys to the city of New York by the mayor of New York. Then we went to Philadelphia and in the meantime those kids were in and out of uniforms all the time. I mean they had no rest at all. We got to Philadelphia and I had Felix Greenfield, who was a representative for Warner Brothers, with us all the time and I said, "Felix, those uniforms are beginning to look shabby." He said, "Let's have them cleaned." "Cleaned? We got a program tomorrow morning." He said, "Just tell each youngster to leave his uniform outside of the door and put his name in it." And tomorrow morning sure enough those uniforms were spotless. (laughter) That's the kind of service. And then he said another thing, "I think we should have a patch made with Music Man on it so we can put it on the left sleeve." "Well, where you going to get them?" "Oh, don't worry about them." Two hours later some seamstresses were there putting the patches on--service unbelievable! So we went to Philadelphia and they had a nice tour of Philadelphia. Again we were invited to city hall and given keys to the city of Philadelphia, and while we were there we got a letter from--a telegram or call--from Arthur Godfrey asking us to do two shows with him in New York. Well, here we were ready to come back to Lockport. The ten days were up. We had to go back to New York again and we started at, I think, nine o'clock in the morning and went through three hours of taping to prepare what was then the fourth and the fifth of July show. He asked me if we had the Stars and Stripes. Well, we had nineteen numbers memorized, but we didn't



have the Stars and Stripes as one of those numbers. He said, "We have to have something for the fourth of July." And I said, "Well, how about The Voice of the Gun?" "Beautiful!" So we played everything that we did on the field routine. As a matter of fact, we did a show for Dick Clark in Philadelphia.

ANDERSON: Dick Clark of American Bandstand fame?

CANEVA: Right, and the kids were invited to his show. We had to put on a four minute routine. You had a ten minute routine prepared--a half-time show--and this guy tells you you have twenty minutes to cut it down to four minutes. You're not dealing with professionals there; you're dealing with kids. So we went out on the blacktop facing Dick Clark's whatever it was. It's a big barn is what it is really. Most of those studios are. And we worked under that hot sun. It must have been 102°. We worked on it for about twenty minutes and, of course, they put it on the show. When I think back I wonder how is it possible for kids to do those things. They're just unbelievable. I mean if they want to do it, they can do things that just really surprise you. We went back to Arthur Godfrey and we worked about three hours. At twelve o'clock he said, "Are you satisfied now?" They kept taping all the time. I said, "It sounds pretty good to me." He said, "How about doing another one this afternoon?" Oh, boy! (laughter) I asked the kids and, yes, they wanted to do another one. So he said, "I'll tell you," and he turned around to Felix Greenfield and said, "Take this band and see to it that they get something to eat and then bring them back." Well, we were supposed to be back at the studios at two o'clock. Now Arthur sent us over to what was called the Grato--a beautiful eating place. These kids had never seen





anything like that. I think the meals started at \$16.00. (laughter) They had a choice of anything they wanted. Well, in the meantime they were slow serving us and Felix Greenfield was on pins and needles. "Ernie, we've got to get over there. I know that man. He's going to hit the ceiling." "Well," I said, "I won't leave until these kids are fed." So at three o'clock we walk into the studios and Felix was shaking like a leaf. I walked in first and he said, "Did the kids enjoy their dinner?" I said, "Very much so." "Do you think they feel like working now?" So Felix almost fell over (laughter) and we worked another three hours and then we left for Lockport. It was just one of those things. They still talk about it today--I mean unbelievable.

ANDERSON: What year was this?

CANEVA: 1963.

ANDERSON: Fantastic! Well, what was it like when you got back?

CANEVA: Well, when we came back that night there were 15,000 or 20,000 people waiting for us. Just unbelievable! You couldn't get through any one of the streets downtown. Like I said while we were talking about things going up and down, it happened to Belvidere, Illinois, one of the fine bands when Gates was there. When he left the program went down. Hinsdale, Buckborough--I'm going back not thirty, thirty-five years--the same thing now they're starting to come up again. And Carlin ville, Illinois, for example, a fine band. I can't think of his name offhand. He's in the ABA with me. He's gone now and somebody else came in. You're going to find that there's going to be a conflict of directors and students for a little while until things begin to change, you see. And you'll find that situation. Joliet Central is coming up. Ted Lega is doing a beautiful job with that band.



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